1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

Although *Q̓omoqwa* has often been seen by mortals, no one has ever been able to describe his countenance. He always wears a huge hat, beneath which his blackened face, covered with eagle down, is barely visible, since he constantly keeps turning it away from the observer. Occasionally he comes to the surface and has been known even to walk on it. Like other supernatural beings, he is able to ascend to *Nusmăt·a*, though it is not his home. The dread with which the Bella Coola regard *Q̓omoqwa* is due to his ability to suck canoes down to his home at the bottom of the ocean as if in a whirlpool. He is usually hungry, and nothing pleases him more than human flesh. None the less, he does not destroy life without cause. It angers him to hear his name spoken, so no Bella Coola utters it when on the ocean, for fear that he may be engulfed. Whenever a person is drowned at sea it is believed that the cannibalistic *Q̓omoqwa* has drawn him down for a meal.

To insert the many stories describing *Q̓omoqwa* at this point would unduly break the continuity of this account, so the following simple example must suffice.

Not many years ago four Bella Bella fishermen were trying to anchor near China Hat. Owing to the action of the supernatural beings dwelling below, the bottom of the ocean rose and lowered abruptly so that their anchor would not hold as the rope was in many cases too short. They were much annoyed by this and, as they strove to fasten their craft, they were exasperated at a lard-fish which kept swimming closely around the canoe. At last one of the fishermen reached out, seized it with his hands, and tore it to pieces, throwing these back on the water. Presently their anchor held and the four went to sleep. But *Q̓omoqwa* had seen the insult shown to the lard-fish and, as they slept, he sucked down their canoe until, on awakening, they found themselves in the huge house of the lord of the undersea world. There was no water in it, but they recognized where they must be from the fact that the walls were decorated with paintings of marine beings and with ancient tools from canoes lost at sea. An old woman who lives in *Q̓omoqwa*'s house called the four to her fire in the corner and asked them whether they had any false hellebore with them. If they had, they would escape, but otherwise nothing could save them from *Q̓omoqwa*, who at that very moment was calling his friends for a feast of human flesh. Presently *Q̓omoqwa* entered, followed in succession by a number of undersea chiefs,

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

782 next day the weather was fine. This particular method of
424 praying had been learnt by one of his ancestors in the begin-
821 ning of time, and was afterwards transmitted in his family.
[785] With the coming of the white man and consequent decay of
[177] customs, it has not been exercised since the death of the grand-father of the man from whom the information was obtained.

SACRIFICE

782 It might be expected that a clear division should be made between the subjects of prayer and sacrifice, but in practice they merge into one another. A mountain goat hunter, when camped near a glacier which he knows to be the haunt of some dreaded supernatural being, asks help from him. He wears
[824] dyed and undyed cedar-bark decorations to make his request more ceremonious, and after the prayer throws them into the fire, saying:

"Please accept these, supernatural one," thus making an offering to supplement his verbal petition.

[824] If he is even more cautious, or eager not to offend any
[825] supernatural being in the vicinity, he throws on the fire tufts
[261] of cedar-bark, eagle down, and scraps of food as well. Whether or not the objects thus destroyed by the flames reach the being to whom the request has been made, is a matter upon which the Bella Coola do not theorize; but the generosity and self-denial of the donor is appreciated, and a favour is often granted in return. A man who frequently hears in his dreams the voice of some supernatural being, knows that it is taking an interest in his doings and endeavours to propitiate it, by placing on a fire titbits of any food he has obtained, saying at the same time:

"*W'ai, wai, wai*," "More, more, more," that is, "May I receive more of the same."

A foolish person fails to show his appreciation of favours received, but a wise man never forgets to do so.

[502] Likewise a person is careful to propitiate supernatural
[133] powers when in peril. Both at Kwatna and at Mesatche Nose,
[756]

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

the point between Labouchere Channel and Bentinck Arm, there is danger from treacherous currents, so, when a shaman passes either of these places, he lays some food on the water and puffs eagle down into the air as he asks for help. If no shaman is in the canoe, this is done by the captain.

The being to whom offerings are most commonly made is *Ťhitcäplilän·a*, the supernatural woman who cures the sick and gives power to shamans. Whenever a hunter kills an edible animal in the forest, he cuts off four pieces of flesh and throws them into his fire to gain her goodwill. Long, long ago, *Ťhitcäplilän·a* appeared to a hunter, seized some of his quarry, and told him of her wishes with regard to presents; these have since been obeyed by wise people. Similarly, the relatives of a man absent in the mountains or at sea throw scraps of food on the fire and ask the protection of *Ťhitcäplilän·a* for the one in danger. In this case, it is clear that objects thrown into flames are received and appreciated by *Ťhitcäplilän·a*.

Mınakaıs, although usually propitiated by prayer, is also given presents. Frequently, when a man is praying, he accompanies his words by blowing up into the air small particles of eagle down. Prayers in connection with the departure of war or hunting expeditions have already been mentioned, but before starting on any journey by canoe, the captain is careful to pray and to throw upon the water four pieces of red, and four of yellow cedar-bark. The blowing upwards of eagle down is a common accompaniment to all kinds of prayers, but, if none is available, cedar-bark can be used equally satisfactorily. If possible, this is cast on the surface of water, otherwise into a fire, as a request is being made. The Bella Coola do not believe that such presents are actually used and considered valuable by *Ałquntäm*, but they emphasize and accompany the vocal prayer, and demonstrate the petitioner's sincerity.

Ghosts, on the other hand, depend almost entirely on presents given them by mortals, since food is not abundant in the land below. The relatives of a dead person always throw

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

a man, *ut-unaisa*, with the prerogative of enforcing obedience to river taboos. Ever since, the owner of this name, when it has been duly legalized, has had the right to perform this function. In some cases, such as carpenters and singers, the validation of a prerogative has not brought with it the necessary ability, so that the incumbent remains a properly ratified, but non-functioning, craftsman. No mechanical skill is required by a River Guardian, hence the owner of the name *ut-unaisa* has always been able to perform his duties. 424 463 551 693 [793]

From time immemorial certain restrictions have been enforced concerning the river: No refuse may be thrown in, otherwise the olachen would remain in the ocean. For the same reason, women at certain periods are not allowed to bathe lest a speck of blood should blind the fish and prevent them from seeing the route. Occasionally an olachen with red eyes is caught; this is caused by some heedless woman. When the fish are running in the river, women are not allowed on the bank, nor to repair the nets. At high tide, it is forbidden to drive stakes for olachen nets. 784 825 226 [515] 841 [562]

The number of prohibitions increases during the critical period of the salmon run. Then no freshly hewn planks can be set afloat, and even a canoe which has just been completed must be kept for ten days before launching. No one whose husband or wife has died within the last year can embark at the village, but must proceed to a landing-place at the head of the fiord. Most important of all, refuse of salmon must be deposited in the woods; if thrown into the river, the fish would smell it and avoid the stream. Even accidents such as the upsetting of a canoe, or the spilling of olachen grease, are considered to be offences. [502] [765]

Disregard of any of these injunctions is displeasing to the salmon and it is the duty of the River Guardian to punish the offender, irrespective of his rank. In case of slight infringements, he beats the guilty person or throws him into the river. The guilty person usually scrambles out, but should he be swept away and drowned, no recompense can be claimed by 688 693

2: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

tacles; metal coal-oil cans are found convenient for this purpose and have almost replaced watertight boxes. After repeated stirrings and skimmings, all that remains is a mass of putrid flesh, bearing no resemblance whatever to the fish from which it came. The Kitlobe are said to compress this into cakes for eating, but the Bella Coola throw it away. Some cooks bail out the dregs by hand, but many of the box-kettles have a bung-hole at the bottom which, when opened, allows the semi-liquid remains to flow out into a rough trough leading to the river. As soon as one batch of olachen has thus been disposed of, another is boiled and refined in the same way. The grease keeps indefinitely and is a useful article of barter with the Carriers as well as a staple of Bella Coola diet. Although the preparation removes much of its offensive odour, olachen grease has an unpleasant taste to the white man.

During the boiling, all other activities are suspended and the people spend practically all their time on the river bank. If the fish are allowed to rot too long, much of the grease is lost, so men, women, and children are pressed into service to make the most of the short period. The men rise at dawn to start the fires on the bank, the women and children follow with food, and for several days the whole village camps, as if on a picnic, amid an indescribably foul smell that almost sickens anyone passing within hundreds of yards. There are tasks for everyone; the fish must be carried from the pits to the furnaces, wood must be brought, the fires stoked, the kettles stirred, the grease carried away, the fireplaces repaired, food cooked, and a hundred other chores. It is a scene of great activity, carried on with good humour and merriment, for the Bella Coola realize that they are storing up luxuries for the following winter. Even the dogs seem to share the general excitement, and do not disdain to eat the dregs from the kettles, which, when emptied into the river, attract numerous trout and gulls, to the joy of small boys with hunting desires.

BELLA COOLA CANOES

Although travel and transport by water is still as vital to the Bella Coola as it was to their fathers, the motor-boat is fast replacing the canoe, and the science of manufacturing their own craft is being lost. In former times several types were constructed, but only one of these is still employed —the spoon canoe, *sō·tla*, used on rivers (see Plate 21). These vary from twenty to thirty feet or more in length, and are about four feet wide; they are without keels, and there is no difference between the bow and stern. Although one man can handle such a craft in smooth water, at least two are required for a journey of any length, and four is the usual crew. The captain, who is either the best waterman or the one most familiar with the route, stands in the stern, the second in command in

2:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

the bow. The crew take their places at equal intervals between, each ready to work on the opposite side from the man in front. Each is provided with a ten-foot pole and also a paddle for use in spots where the river is too deep for poling. The rivers of central British Columbia are shallow, but swift, and their navigation requires considerable skill. Going upstream, the captain constantly seeks the smoothest water, where he knows the current will be least strong, and uses his pole to keep the craft headed in the right direction. Should it be caught in a violent eddy, he exerts his full strength, and it is his voice that rallies the crew for a final exertion to shove the canoe through. Coming downstream is more dangerous though less wearying. The water is so cold and the current so swift that a capsizing usually causes the drowning of one or more of the occupants, and the captain must never relax. Spoon canoes are very stable, and cannot be upset by a faulty distribution of weight. This is essential in view of the rapids, but they are heavy and cumbersome, unsuited to carrying large loads.

When a carpenter wishes to make a canoe, he fells a cedar of suitable size and trims off bark and branches to leave the central stem available. Slowly and laboriously he chips with his adze until he has hollowed out the trunk to the proper shape, and at the same time has smoothed away the outer surface. Sometimes a small fire is built on the trunk so that it will char the wood beneath and make it easier to remove, but the carpenter must be careful that the flames do not spread too far. Finally, as his work reaches completion, he becomes even more painstaking than before. The sides and bottom are whittled to a thickness of no more than three inches, and at this stage a faulty stroke may pierce the shell and ruin the toil of weeks. When completed, it is necessary to widen and harden the canoe. A fire is built beside it and stones thrown into the flames to heat; then lifted out and dropped into the water with which the craft has been partly filled. Steam rises, and the carpenter confines it by covering the canoe with matting, at the same time endeavouring to pull and force the sides apart. Sometimes he can do so by mere muscular effort, more often it is necessary to lay transverse thwarts within and, by pounding them downwards, extend the sides. No great extension is possible, nor is it required, but the steaming process is considered to harden the wood as well as widen the canoe.

Until five or ten years ago, the Bella Coola made another type of canoe, *dáne*, for use on the ocean. A few examples of this style are still in existence (see Plate 22). Though approximately the same length as river canoes, they are proportionately much deeper and narrower, and an extension downwards near the stern serves in place of a keel. These craft are sufficiently sea-worthy to weather any ordinary storm. Several